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NEWS RELEASE

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B-I-G Elephant Picking His Favorite Team for Sunday's B-I-G Game

WHO: Mabu the African elephant and his Zoo Keepers
WHEN: Thursday, January 29, 2015 at 10 a.m.
WHERE: Reid Park Zoo's *Expedition Tanzania* habitat

Whether you plan to root for Seattle or New England, we will all cheer for Mabu, Arizona's BIGGEST resident, as he picks the winning team for the BIGGEST football game to be played Sunday. This Thursday, January 29th, Mabu the African Elephant will be given two sticks with paper flags to select from – each one representing a team in the championship game. The team's stick he delivers to Keepers first will be deemed Mabu's chosen team. The "pick" will take place at 10 a.m., in *Expedition Tanzania*, the Zoo's African elephant habitat. If visitors want to enjoy the festivities, they should allow plenty of time to walk from the admission gate to the elephant habitat by 10 a.m.

Approximately 73,000 people will attend the game in Phoenix this Sunday – but over 175 MILLION people visit AZA facilities annually - more than NFL, NBA, NHL, and MLB annual attendance combined. "This means we ALL win," says Vivian VanPeenen, the Zoo's Curator of Education. "Visits to zoos provide quality time outdoors, and education opportunities not available at any other venue." Scientific research has demonstrated that Zoo visitors experience a stronger connection to nature and reconsider their role in environmental problems and conservation action.

Will Mabu select the team with an animal mascot? Will it be the team with the highest number of accredited AZA (Association of Zoos and Aquariums) facilities within a 100 mile radius of their home stadium? Or, will it be the team who loves their local Zoo the most? Mabu has made several big game predictions already, and has a 50% accuracy rate.

Regardless of the team selected, the skill Mabu will be demonstrating is an important one. Mabu is conditioned to offer many behaviors that help the Zoo take better care of him. He is trained to give items to Keepers for his own safety. If he ever comes in contact with a dangerous item, a Keeper can reliably ask him for it – and reward him with a tasty treat in exchange. The daily interaction with Keepers to learn new behaviors also keeps him active and mentally alert. Mabu participates in his own care by choice – from dental exams to foot scrubs – and he can walk away at any time he chooses. Keepers will have him demonstrate several skills, in addition to team selection, during this training demonstration.

Reid Park Zoo is located in central Tucson within Reid Park and hosts over half a million visitors each year. The Zoo is home to a diverse collection of over 400 animals, many of which are rare or endangered. Admission is \$9 for adults and \$5 for children ages 2 -14. The Zoo is open from 9am to 4pm. daily. For information, call (520) 791-4022 or visit the Reid Park Zoo website at www.reidparkzoo.org.

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